



TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

COMMITTEE REFERRAL: CAI

MARCH 20, 2024

HCR 180/HR 160, REQUESTING THE GOVERNOR TO DECLARE A CYBER HARASSMENT AND CYBERBULLYING AWARENESS DAY.

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **supports** HCR 180/HR 160, which declare a cyber harassment and cyber bullying awareness day.

Democracy is fragile.

On January 6, 2021, far-right ideologues tried to tear apart the delicate fabric with which our society's governing bonds are woven and forcefully overturn the will of our nation's voters. The insurrection at the United States Capitol left citizens reeling from the audacity of the attempted coup and searching for answers about how to prevent future assaults on our republic.

Even in Hawai'i, the aftermath of the January 6th attacks was painfully felt. Security barricades were erected on the grounds of the Hawaii State Capitol in advance of Inauguration Day, after threats were made against political officials throughout our country. At a time when pandemic protocols emptied the people's house of visitors, the Capitol riots only further alienated elected leaders from the constituents they serve.

As Congress's investigation into the insurrection has revealed, much of the madness that occurred on January 6th was organized online. Cyberspace is no

longer an undiscovered frontier. Today, our virtual and actual lives have become inextricably comingled. If we are not careful, though, technological advancement can generate the digital reproduction of inequality, discrimination, and violence.

According to a 2018 report published by the data clearinghouse Statista, 64 percent of teenagers in the United States have encountered hate speech on social media. At the same time, incidents of political violence have been escalating. The Washington Post reported in 2021 that right-wing extremists have been involved in 267 plots or attacks since 2015, resulting in 91 fatalities.

Furthermore, over half of the deaths caused by right-wing confrontations were committed by people who voiced support for white supremacy. Many of those outbursts were organized virtually amidst the shadows of social media. Washington Post's investigation found that from 2015 to 2020, the use of websites and social media by right-wing extremists rose in five of the six years that the news outlet studied, leading Georgetown professor George Hoffman to call social media a "propellant" for the spread of violent extremism.

It can be easy to neglect the foundations of our democracy. From housing insecurity to financial instability to the climate crisis, our society is simultaneously facing many pressing challenges. If we safeguard the pillars of our public sphere from digital mayhem, however, then we will give future generations a chance to resolve those concerns with tranquility and hope.

Mahalo nui loa,

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